

P 130931Z FEB 90
FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7236
INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN

UNCLAS JOHANNESBURG 00264

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 12356: N/A

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SUBJECT: THOUSANDS IN JOHANNESBURG PEACEFULLY
CELEBRATE MANDELA RELEASE

¶1. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF HAPPY REVELERS HAVE FILLED THE STREETS OF JOHANNESBURG AND SURROUNDING TOWNSHIPS SINCE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF NELSON MANDELA'S RELEASE WAS MADE ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 10. CROWDS OF SEVERAL HUNDRED GATHERED IN SPONTANEOUS CELEBRATIONS IN THE CITY CENTER ON SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, MANY OF THEM MARCHING TO THE NEARBY "GRAY" ENTERTAINMENT AREA OF HILLBROW, WHERE A THRONG OF MORE THAN 5,000 FILLED THE STREETS BOTH DAYS. POLICE MAINTAINED A LOW PROFILE, OFFERING PROTECTIVE ASSISTANCE RATHER THAN DISRUPTING THE DEMONSTRATIONS. THE MOOD HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY ONE OF JOY, WITH FEW REPORTS OF PROBLEMS AND NONE OF THE LOOTING REPORTED IN CAPE TOWN.

¶2. IN SOWETO THE CROWDS HAVE BEEN MUCH BIGGER BUT THE MOOD THE SAME. THE STREETS ARE FILLED WITH HAPPY CELEBRATORS, AND THE SCHOOLS ARE EMPTY AS STUDENTS JOIN THE FESTIVITIES. A LARGE CROWD GATHERED AT JABULANI AMPHITHEATER TO CELEBRATE ON SUNDAY, AND TENS OF THOUSANDS FILLED RICKETY ORLANDO STADIUM -- FAR EXCEEDING ITS CAPACITY -- ON MONDAY TO AWAIT THE EXPECTED ARRIVAL OF MANDELA. (THE CROWD WAS DISAPPOINTED, HOWEVER, AS HIS RETURN TO SOWETO HAS BEEN DELAYED UNTIL TUESDAY.) A HUGE CROWD CONTINUES TO WAIT OUTSIDE THE MANDELA HOME IN ORLANDO WEST, AND THOUSANDS OF OTHERS ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE TOWNSHIP IN PRIVATE CELEBRATION. POLICE PRESENCE IS NEGLIGIBLE, WITH "YOUNG COMRADES" TAKING OVER TRAFFIC DIRECTION RESPONSIBILITIES (WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS). SINGING, DANCING, HUGGING, CHANTING AND CLENCHED FIST SALUTES ARE THE ORDER OF THE DAY.

¶3. THE SCENE HAS BEEN SIMILAR IN OTHER TOWNSHIPS IN THE GREATER JOHANNESBURG AREA, WHERE HOMES HAVE BEEN EMPTIED AS THOUSANDS HAVE TAKEN TO THE STREETS. THE MOOD HAS BEEN GENERALLY FRIENDLY, BUT A NUMBER OF INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE HAVE BEEN REPORTED. THE CELEBRATIONS HAVE BEEN MARRED IN SOWETO BY DRUNKEN YOUTHS TRYING TO HIJACK CARS, APPROPRIATE FUEL FROM FILLING STATIONS, AND HARASS MOTORISTS. AT LEAST ONE GRENADE ATTACK, AGAINST A CITY COUNCILLOR'S HOUSE, HAS BEEN REPORTED. BLOODSHED OCCURRED OVER THE WEEKEND ON THE VOLATILE EAST RAND, AS FIVE WERE KILLED IN CONFRONTATIONS WITH POLICE IN KATLEHONG. FARTHER AFIELD, TWO DEATHS ALSO OCCURRED IN WELKOM, AS A POLICE VAN PLOWED INTO A CROWD OF CELEBRATORS, SENDING MORE THAN 20 OTHERS TO THE HOSPITAL. BY AND LARGE, HOWEVER, THE POPULAR RESPONSE HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE. GIVEN THE SIZE OF THE CROWDS AND THE UNIMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE OF THE NATIONAL RECEPTION COMMITTEE THUS FAR, NEGATIVE INCIDENTS HAVE BEEN MUCH FEWER THAN WE MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED. IT IS LIKELY, IN FACT, THAT SOWETO'S NORMALLY HIGH RATE OF WEEKEND CRIME DROPPED PRECIPITOUSLY THIS PARTICULAR WEEKEND.

¶4. WHILE MOST OF THE CELEBRATORS ARE BLACK, WE HAVE SEEN VIRTUALLY NO EVIDENCE OF HOSTILITY TOWARDS WHITES. SIMILARLY, WE HAVE HEARD OF NO INCIDENTS OF RIGHT-WING WHITE ATTACKS AGAINST BLACKS. POLICE ARE

LAYING LOW, PERMITTING THE CELEBRATIONS TO TAKE THEIR COURSE. THE CELEBRATORS, EVEN THOUGH THEIR ACTIONS HAVE BEEN LARGELY SPONTANEOUS, ARE MAINTAINING CONTROL TO A LARGE EXTENT. IT HAS BEEN AN IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY OF TOLERANCE AND HARMONY THUS FAR, BUT THE REAL TEST WILL OCCUR WHEN MANDELA HIMSELF ARRIVES IN SOWETO LATER TODAY (FEBRUARY 13). HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS WILL BE WAITING FOR HIM, AND THE SHEER CRUSH OF HUMANITY WILL BE DIFFICULT TO CONTAIN.

CHAVEAS